

PUBLIC POLICY IN CONNECTICUT

Challenges and Perspectives

Edited by
Gary L. Rose

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Preface

Connecticut government and politics have been lifelong interests of mine. Both of my parents were involved in various ways in local politics and it seemed as if political activity was integral to family life. Thus, it was inevitable that my personal interest in Connecticut politics would evolve into a more serious professional commitment. For more than twenty years now, I have devoted a significant portion my professional writings to the fascinating topic of Connecticut politics.

With the devolution of power to state governments, which began in earnest during the historic “Reagan Revolution” of the early 1980s, my interest in Connecticut politics has become even more acute. In addition to studies presented at professional conferences, journal articles, and several op-eds in the *Hartford Courant* regarding political trends in Connecticut, I have authored two books on the subject of Connecticut politics. In 1992, I authored a volume entitled *Connecticut Politics at the Crossroads*.¹ This was an examination of party organization decline in Connecticut and the political consequences of this trend. Several state lawmakers and party organization officials were interviewed for this work and provided insight into what was rapidly becoming a new style of politics in Connecticut. Recognizing that students were in need of a more comprehensive description of Connecticut government and politics, I then decided to write a textbook on the subject. The end result, published in 2001, was a volume entitled

Connecticut Government at the Millennium.² In this work, I explored Connecticut's rich constitutional tradition, the state's political culture, trends involving the two-party system, the growing power of special interest groups at the Connecticut state Capitol, as well as the structure and policy-making capacity of Connecticut's governing institutions. This seven-chapter textbook also included extensive interviews with leading political figures in Connecticut government and politics, including, among others, the Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives, the governor of Connecticut, and the chief justice of the state supreme court.

Although *Connecticut Government at the Millennium* explored the policy-making structures of state government, the work stopped short of examining the actual policy challenges that currently confront Connecticut lawmakers. It thus became clear shortly after the publication of that volume that a companion work focusing on the major public policy challenges within the state of Connecticut needed to be written. After considerable inquiry into an array of challenges facing Connecticut state lawmakers, I was able to discern ten complex and critical policy challenges that in my judgment require the most immediate attention on the floors of the Connecticut state legislature.

Once the ten issues were outlined, I recruited a team of contributors who, in my view, would address the policy challenges in an objective and rigorous fashion. Fortunately, I was able to find a highly qualified group of contributors within the ranks of the faculty at Sacred Heart University. Each individual recruited for the project had extensive expertise related to the assigned policy challenge. Indeed, several of the contributors were well-respected and nationally renowned scholars, lecturers, and public policy consultants. Needless to say, I am grateful to each and every one of them for their commitment to this project and confidence in me as the volume's editor.

The introduction discusses the devolution of power to state governments during the past twenty-five years, and outlines ten policy challenges that await Connecticut lawmakers. These issues are then explored by the individual contributors in separate chapters. It is important to note at this point that the ten public

policy challenges, although addressed in separate chapters, do not by any means exist in a policy-making vacuum. Indeed, as I was compiling, editing, and reviewing the various essays for this text it became increasingly clear how closely interconnected seemingly disparate policy challenges are with one another. Every policy challenge and every policy recommendation has direct ramifications for the nine others.

I organize the chapters in this book in a manner that clusters the ten policy challenges into two broad groups: those public policies that affect the Connecticut population at large, and those that have bearing on subsets of the state's population, several of whom are clearly and unfortunately at risk. The policy challenges associated with economic growth, transportation, environmental protection, ethnic diversity, and ethics in politics are presented in chapters one through five. Such policies have exceptionally broad consequences for all residents of Connecticut, regardless of income, occupation, race, or place of residence. One might label such policy areas as the "macro" challenges that face state lawmakers. The focus then shifts to policy challenges that seem to affect more specific population groups in Connecticut, although it should be evident that such policy areas do have consequences for all residents of Connecticut. Thus, in chapters six through ten, the policy challenges associated with health care, services for the aged, prison overcrowding and recidivism, inner-city education, and higher education are examined. Such policy areas are where the reader will also discover a considerable degree of human suffering and stress. One could argue that it is within such policy areas where policy resolutions are perhaps the most desperately needed. The chapters unfold as follows.

In chapter one, Thomas D. Corrigan examines the condition of Connecticut's economy. He provides a penetrating overview of the various sectors of the state's economy, followed by a description of specific economic problem areas. Corrigan advocates creative economic planning on the part of state decision makers for the purpose of stimulating economic growth.

Connecticut's severely congested transportation system is explored by William B. Kennedy in chapter two. The gridlock one experiences on Connecticut's highways is not only described in

this chapter, but also explained. He explores alternative transportation strategies that would alleviate congestion, and examines the possible impact of an increase in telecommuting.

In chapter three, Jennifer H. Mattei examines the various environmental challenges that have emerged within the state of Connecticut. The degradation of Connecticut's forested ecosystem and the multiple consequences that emanate from such a condition are thoroughly explored in this chapter, along with the complex challenge of managing the large number of pollutants that currently threaten the state's air, soil, and water. Noting the ineffectiveness of existing environmental protection laws, Mattei proposes innovative solutions for improving the quality of Connecticut's threatened environment.

In chapter four, I explore the political and policy challenges associated with the growing ethnic diversity of Connecticut's population. In this chapter, special emphasis is placed on the political and policy attitudes of nonwhites in comparison to whites. The data suggest in no uncertain terms that state lawmakers in Connecticut must work especially hard to bridge a deep and wide racial divide. The data are supplemented with comments and observations from political practitioners in Connecticut, along with the perspective of an inner-city school principal in the beleaguered city of Hartford.

Chapter five, by Brian Stiltner, presents a penetrating discussion regarding the challenge of ethical political leadership. Stiltner reviews the ethical dilemma that has descended on the Connecticut polity in recent years and presents a clear analysis of the ethical standards one should expect from those elected to positions of political leadership. The chapter concludes with a set of policy prescriptions, which, if adopted, should elevate the ethical conduct of Connecticut's public servants. Stiltner's contribution is particularly relevant in light of the 2004 impeachment investigation against Governor John G. Rowland, which resulted in the Governor's resignation from office and a plea bargain in federal court. Rowland was subsequently sentenced to federal prison for one year and one day.

The challenge of health care is explored by Jody Bortone, Michael J. Emery, and Patricia W. Walker in chapter six. They

focus particularly on the shortage of health care professionals in the Connecticut workforce, the increasing difficulty Connecticut residents face with respect to accessing and receiving appropriate health care services, and the rising costs associated with the many dimensions of health care. The authors conclude their essay with a very specific set of remedial measures designed to resolve the disturbing trends in the state's health care system.

In chapter seven, Nicole X. Cauvin and Elaine B. Davis discuss the policy challenges associated with an aging or "graying" state population. Demographic data clearly demonstrate that Connecticut's population, similar to the population of other states, is becoming older. The authors propose innovative public policies designed to accommodate the long-term health care and social service needs of the state's elderly.

Prison overcrowding and recidivism are investigated by Pearl Jacobs in chapter eight. The trends and studies examined in this chapter have direct bearing on prison conditions across the land. Jacobs believes that better job training and a more sincere attempt to reintegrate ex-offenders into society, rather than the construction of more cells and penal institutions, would more effectively address the problem of overcrowded prisons and recidivism.

The complex challenge of inner-city education is reviewed by Lois A. Libby in chapter nine. She presents a stark look at the two very different worlds of urban and suburban education in Connecticut, and discusses recent reforms and policy proposals to reduce educational disparity in the "two Connecticuts."

The challenge of sustaining a quality system of higher education in Connecticut is examined in chapter ten by Steven Michels, where he discusses the fiscal difficulties that currently confront institutions of higher learning and the creative attempts on the part of colleges and universities to generate revenue. Michels parts company with educators who advocate more government spending for the purpose of resolving the "crisis" in higher education and instead recommends reforms less dependent on government aid.

The ten major policy challenges examined in this volume are the most important and pressing issues currently confronting the

state of Connecticut. Granted, there are policy challenges beyond the ten identified that could have been incorporated into this work. Protecting Connecticut residents from a terrorist attack, election reform, improving Connecticut's capacity to withstand a power outage such as that experienced throughout the Northeast in 2003, and elevating the standard of public housing for Connecticut's poor are among the policy challenges that could be added to the list. Nevertheless, the challenges addressed in this work are ones that require immediate attention on the part of the Connecticut General Assembly and should receive top priority on the state legislative agenda.

Notes

1. Gary L. Rose, *Connecticut Politics at the Crossroads* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1992).

2. Gary L. Rose, *Connecticut Government at the Millennium* (Fairfield: Sacred Heart University Press, 2001).

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